1980 COMIC ART CONVENTION

JULY 4th, 5th, and 6th
STATLER HOTEL
SEVENTH AVENUE AT 33RD STREET
NEW YORK CITY

OFFICIAL PROGRAM BOOK

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1980 COMIC ART CONVENTION

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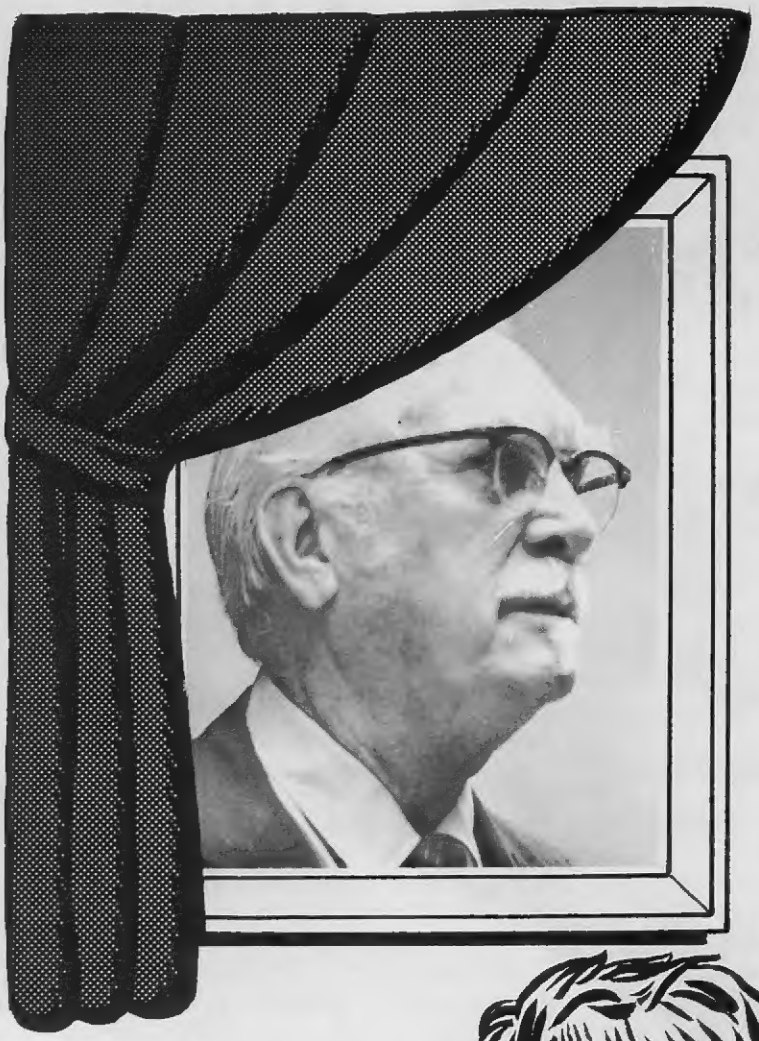


IN MEMORIAM

NORMAN MINGO

1896 - 1980

Norman Mingo, the artist who put drawings of Alfred E. Neuman on the covers of MAD Magazine, died on May 8th at St. Agnes Hospital, White Plains, where he had been a patient for several weeks. He was 84.

A Chicago native, Mr. Mingo was president of a Chicago advertising agency in the late twenties. One of his employees was C. C. Beck, then still in his teens. When the Great Depression struck, Mr. Mingo moved to New York and became a freelance illustrator.

MAD Magazine advertised for an artist in 1956, and Norman Mingo got the job. He worked on MAD covers until 1979 when his health began to fail, according to Jerry De Fuccio, associate editor.

"He was a tremendous inspiration to all of us," De Fuccio said. "He would shower praise on the younger artists, but he was always modest about his own talent."

EXCERPT FROM NORMAN MINGO'S WILL:

This advice is the greatest legacy I can leave you . . . That you may never be afraid.

Norman Mingo

MR. MINGO, WHO WAS AN ELDER OF THE SECOND REFORMED CHURCH, USED THE CHRISTIAN "SIGN OF THE FISH" IN CONJUNCTION WITH HIS SIGNATURE.

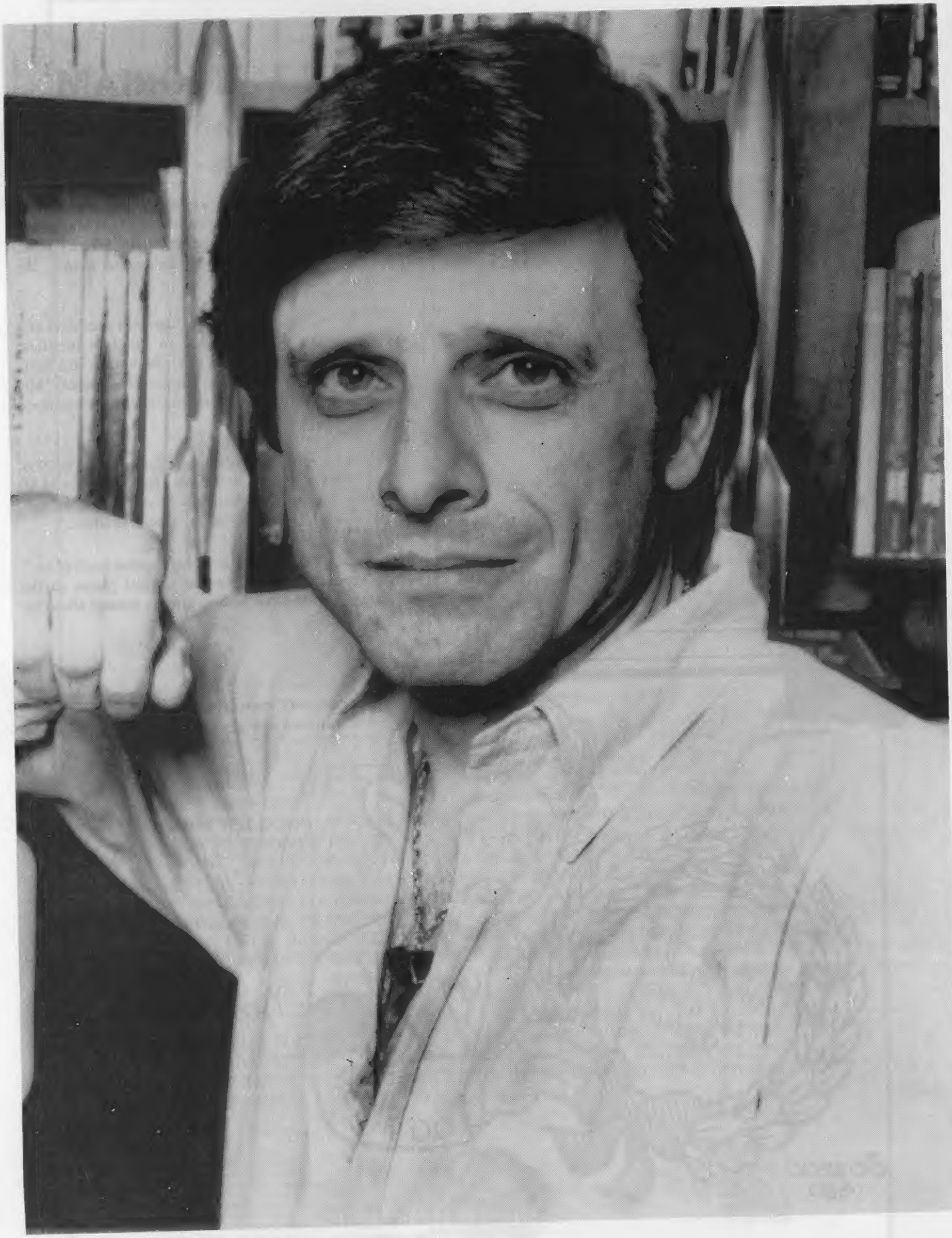


Photo by Richard Todd

Harlan Ellison

Have you ever had a friend who went out a saw a new movie or joined est or found Jesus or made love in a hot tub, and when you asked, "Well, how was it?" he said, "I'm sorry, but it's impossible to describe. You'll just have to experience it for yourself."?

"Aw, come on," you might say. "Tell me about it! Was it fun? Do you feel different now than you did? Should I do it too?"

"Sorry. I really can't explain it. It's not like anything else in the world. You'll just have to find out for yourself."

"But-"

"Sorry."

"Aw, come on. You *gotta* tell me. . . ."

Sorry. I just had my first conversation with Harlan Ellison—and there's no way I can tell you about it. It was, as they say, a unique experience. It was like saying the magic word and having the duck come down and drop fifty thousand more magic words in your lap. I ended up with sixteen pages of semi-comprehensive notes ("Renounce what your audience wants!" "Art is the only thing which will save us!" "Those goddam drones!") and five pages of utterly irrelevant ones ("Not awe but healthy respect." "The hook is swung down and grabs the guy through the chest and swings him off his feet." "The trouble with you is that you're an overintellectualized Jew trying to follow a Zen philosophy in the midst of Western civilizaiton.")

In the end there were few subjects left unspoken. We covered everything from Nikola Tesla's love affair with a white pigeon to how John Maynard Keynes's last name is pronounced. After a solid hour of this, I was left at the end of a silent telephone line, trying vainly to sort out the collage of ideas. The phone rang again. Harlan just had a few more things to add on the subject of Lao Tse . . .oh, yeah, and crypto-Nazism . . . and while he was at it, the answer to that fascinating, age-old riddle, "What is the purpose of life?" (The funny thing is, he had the best answer to that philosophical conundrum I've yet heard—but don't ask me to repeat it. You'll just have to find out for yourself.) My job—and it wasn't an easy one, what with the conversation uncurling like a naughty hedgehog at a Wonderland croquet match—was to ask the man about his work, specifically, since this is, after all, a comic-art convention, his work in and around comics.

Of his upcoming collaboration with Michael Kaluta on *The Shadow* Ellison said, "I intend to produce a story in the classic mode of the radio *Shadow*. Of course, I'm familiar with the pulps, but the radio version was simpler; it lends itself better to treatment as a comic. The story will have lots of dark San Francisco Chinatown alleys, an insidious evil supervillain, and just enough science fiction to create an ambience. I intend to please and delight those who love the character. In the past when working in comics, I wrote a plot synopsis. In this case I'm suggesting layouts; I see it in a cinematic way and, since I write movies, it's not that difficult, even though I can't draw—not even stick figures."

In Ellison's controversial and opinionated interview in *The Comics Journal*, in which he had a number of negative things to say about certain current practitioners of the art. When I mention that his critics will likely be anxious to examine his upcoming comic book rather closely, to see if Ellison himself lives up to the ideals he sets for the field, Ellison says, "I don't give a damn! They can hold it up forward, backward, or heretofore, as Pogo would say. I'm gonna be doing my best job. So damn 'em."

In between discussions of elitism versus "a kind of romantic belief in the nobility of the common man which, by the way, doesn't exist" and the "possible illusion" of something called True Love, I managed to question Ellison about his upcoming projects. The answers, which he reels off like an efficient social secretary, appall me. (Doesn't this guy ever sleep?) In September there will be a limited edition of *All the Lies That Are My Life* with "ten simply staggering illustrations by Kent Bash, who is a West Coast artist" and an introduction by Robert Silverberg, plus a series of afterwords by a veritable Who's Who of science fiction, including Tom Disch, Vonda MacIntyre, and Philip Jose Farmer. Ellison cryptically describes this item as "a 22,000-word story about two writers, one of whom everyone will think is me, but that's not the case." Scheduled for October is a 70,000-word novel called *Blood's A Rover*, based on the famous *A Boy and His Dog*, with a cover and over thirty illustrations by Richard Corben. Then in November, Houghton-Mifflin will come out with *Shatterday*, and in the spring Bantam will publish *The Media Project*, a collaborative effort which grew out of a series of seminars Ellison gave a few years ago. He got together with Larry Niven, Paul Anderson, Hal Clement, and other science fiction greats to "design" a fictional planet called Medea. Then they and others, including Kate Wilhelm, Theodore Sturgeon, Tom Disch, and Jack Williamson, wrote stories about Medea, as an exercise in creativity. Maps were drawn up, questions were invited from the audience at the seminars, and ultimately the entire corpus of material, including illustrations by Kelly Freas, was gathered into one volume. This promises to be an exceptional document of the fictional process, as well as supplying some doubtlessly great reading.

My journalistic requirements satisfied, Ellison once more took off, this time on subjects of Will Eisner, Federico Fellini, Paolo Solari, Martha Mitchell, and the crushing effect of poverty on artistic creativity. Not all at once, of course, but in dazzingly rapid succession. His mind is like a pinball machine. Lights come one, buzzers, dingers, and bells go off, numbers flash, flippers keep on flipping, and extra points are scored. The ball is always in motion; the free game is just a heartbeat away. Ding ding dingdingding klunka-klunka ding! ding! DING!DING!DING!DING!DING!!!! As I said, it can't be described. You'll just have to experience Harlan Ellison for yourself. Whew!

Photo by Richard Todd

BOB KANE

This year's Comic Art Convention is proud to have as a guest one of the true pioneers in the field, a man whose creations have practically become a household word. I refer to Bob Kane, the man who gave us "Peter Pupp". Peter Pupp? Yes! And "Hiram Hick," too. And who can ever forget his classic feature, "Jest Laffs?" What's that? You've never heard of "Jest Laffs?" Well, then maybe you've heard of Kane's other work. The Batman, perhaps? Robin? Ah, I thought that might ring a bell.

Let me tell you a little bit about the Bob Kane nobody knows. It's a classic story, in a way, a tale that might have gone nowhere had fate not decreed otherwise. You see, Bob Kane was one of that strange and motley crew of young men—boys, actually—who grew up in New York during the Depression, drooled over the comic strip work of Alex Raymond and Milton Caniff, attended the Art Students League, and tried to break into cartooning in 1936. It must have been a wonderful year—there was just a hint in the air of things to come: great things, artistic innovations, the creation of a new art form.

Somehow, the place to be in 1936 was at the office of a man named Henle, who published a now-forgotten rag called *Wow! What a Magazine.* The exclamation point was part of its title, not an indication of my enthusiasm. In fact, the general public was not too impressed with *Wow!* (which also incarnated briefly as *Wow! What a Comic),* and it folded in short order. While it was in existence, however, *Wow!* was the only place where unknown teenagers could publish their work. The magazine served as a reprint vehicle for syndicated Sunday and daily newspaper strips, but it also took on fledgling cartoonists who, presumably, came a lot cheaper than "stars" such as Caniff and Raymond. But even this attempt at cost-cutting didn't save *Wow!* from collapse. Bob Kane's contribution, "Hiram Hick," was, as the name implies, a humor feature. Kane thought of himself as a gag cartoonist in those days. No striking terror into the hearts of criminals for him, not in *Wow!*

When *Wow!* went under in 1937, one of the contributers, a gag cartoonist named Jerry Iger (actually his name was *Samuel* Iger, but that's another story) got together with the mag's in-house, Alex Raymond clone, a fellow named Will Eisner (then called Bill, but that, too, is another story), and the two formed the shoestring-budgeted Eisner-Iger shop. One of the first people they hired was their fellow *Wow!* refugee, Bob Kane.

Eisner-Iger was a veritable comicbook factory, turning out complete packages for any publisher who wanted to get in on the ground floor of the new market for original comics, as well as providing filler material to pad out the remaining reprint titles. It was here that Kane created the funny-animal adventure strip "Peter Pupp," as well as the gag feature "Jest Laffs," both of which appeared in Fiction House's tabloid-sized *Jumbo* comics. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if the course of events had run a little differently. If Peter Pup had been a smashing, overwhelming success, we might never have been graced with the Darknight Detective at all-(not to mention Ace, the Bat-Hound).

Fortunately for fans of the costumed-hero genre, Bob Kane didn't confine himself to work for the Eisner-Iger shop. Beginning in 1938, he also drew a number of features for National Comics, among them the long-forgotten "Ginger Snap," "Jest A Second," "Gumshoe Gus," and "Clip Carson." Then, in 1939, Kane was sitting alone one night (in his smoking jacket, as is well known) beside an open window, contemplating his career as a cartoonist when, suddenly, into the room flew . . . you think I'm kidding, eh? Well, you're right. Actually, according to Kane, the idea of The Batman had been percolating on the back burner of his mind ever since he had seen a drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, depicting a man in a bat-winged flying harness—one of da Vinci's inventions which, needless to say, didn't get off the ground. Strangely enough, Kane's Batman doesn't fly either, although in his first appearances, his cape bears a remarkable resemblance to the da Vinci sketch.

The Batman, who debuted in *Detective Comics* No. 27, changed the entire course of Bob Kane's life. The character's immediate success and the subsequent addition to the DC line under his own title *(Batman* No. 1 appeared in 1940) is an oft-told tale. As time went on, Kane developed a small staff of his own to satisfy the public's demand for Batman comics and a syndicated newspaper strip. Among his helpers were Jerry Robinson, Bill Finger, and Dick Sprang.

The years passed, and the tone of the feature slowly changed from grim nighttime adventure to gimmicky, childhood fare. By the mid-1960s when the fabled "camp" craze struck, The Batman was viewed as both an institution and an example of the silly fun most adults thought "comics" had to be. This was the era of the Bat-things: Bat-mobile, Bat-copter, Bat-Hound, Bat-Mite, Bat-Woman, Bat-Girl, Bat-you-name-it. In 1966 the Batman newspaper strip, dormant since 1946, was revived, and more important, ABC-TV presented the world with a spoofed-up, live-action version of the character which took the nation by storm. An immense amount of merchandising accompanied this craze, of course, and for about a year, every child in America seemed to be the delighted and vociferous owner of a Bat toy of one kind or another.

Then, as quickly as it had come, the fad subsided, leaving only a few Bat balloons and a coloring book or two behind to show where it had been. It was around this time that Bob Kane left comic books. His last official work for National appeared in 1968. He went on to created the animated cartoon series, *Cool McCool,* for NBC-TV, and when CBS brought out its animated *Batman* and *Batman & Robin* cartoon series in the 1970s, Kane was, of course, credited with the creation of the characters.

In recent years The Batman has had a renaissance of sorts, first in the hands of Denny O'Neil and Neal Adams and lately due to the efforts of Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers. Bob Kane, too, has embarked on a renaissance of his own. He has had one-man shows in New York, Chicago, and San Diego, under the auspices of the Circle Galleries, and he has just brought out a set of four limited-edition, autographed color lithographs which are bound to become collector's items. The subject of these new works of art? Well, it isn't Gumshoe Gus!

Bob Kane and Bruce Wayne: a dynamic duo, destined to go down in history together. There are few people in this world who can say that they have truly created a contemporary myth, but Bob Kane is one of them. And in the year 2000, when they open the time capsule buried at the 1939 World's Fair, what do you think the historians will find? No, not Peter Pupp. The Batman.

HEMBECK

Fred Hembeck

Fred Hembeck is a lucky man—and he knows it. The toast of fandom still isn't sure just how he went from being a "failed" superhero artist to his present position as the most popular in-joke satirist of the genre since Jules Feiffer. In just three short years he has risen from general obscurity to a job as DC Comics' pet parodist, *The Buyers Guide's* favorite cartoonist, and, if things go as planned, a regular contributor to Marvel's *What If?* series—besides bringing out his own original comic books. Quite an achievement for a guy whom Vinnie Colletta turned away because he "couldn't draw"!

The man with the spirals on his knees and elbows and the most Jimmy Olsen comics in America was born on January 30, 1953, in Yaphank, New York, a town immortalized (sort of) by the fact that Irving Berlin wrote "God Bless America" while stationed there during World War I. Be that as it may, Hembeck has never credited Irving Berlin with any influence on his world view or aesthetic sense. Instead, as he has so lovingly depicted in his recreations of childhood memories, it was the Mort Weisinger/Curt Swan/Jim Mooney/Kurt Schaffenberger and Co. version of the Superman mythos which brightened his early years—and Steve Ditko and Stan Lee's collaborations at Marvel during the early 1960s which fueled his later fantasies.

Hembeck is an Everyman; his memories are shared by thousands of comic-book fans. His redrawn *Lois Lane* and *Superboy* covers never fail to bring smiles of nostalgic joy to those who remember buying them back when we were all a little younger and a lot more naive. His personal quest for "The Real Face of Steve Ditko" echoes the sentiments of many of his audience—those who knew that Kirby was "King" but Ditko was beyond description, Marvel's own genuine Interdimensional Original. When Hembeck began doing his pages of illustrated commentary and reminiscence for *The Buyers Guide* in late 1977, it was as if he spoke for everyone who had grown up during the Silver Age of comics—or at least the loonier portion of that audience. His popularity spread quickly by word of mouth. "Did you see Hembeck's latest column?" was a sure-fire conversation-starter at comic-book shops and conventions. Branching out from funnies into other media, Hembeck began to serve up his opinions on movies and television, too. About the same time, he started playing around with the "talking head" format he had been using, throwing in pages of purely Hembeckian art, and, most important, creating elaborate spoofs of currently popular comics.

This adept wit landed him a job at DC in 1978 doing a mock daily gag strip for "The Daily Planet" at the behest of Bob Rozakis, Tony Tollin, and Mike Gold. These little strips, mostly built around puns and sight gags relating to the DC line of costumed heroes, continue to this day as an indispensable part of the feature. Hembeck has also been contacted recently by Marvel's Mark Gruenwald to do a two-page feature in an upcoming issue of *What If?* Based on Gruenwald's "Omniversal Theory" of interlocking comic-book realities, this feature will explain briefly the differences between a DC-style "Imaginary Story" and a *What If?*-style "Alternate Reality Story." If this experiment goes over well, it is likely Hembeck will continue to contribute to the magazine on a regular basis.

But his position as court jester to the two major publishers of comics is not Hembeck's major interest these days. His first collection of reprints from *The Buyers Guide,* plus several pages of new material, was published by Eclipse Enterprises last year. *Hembeck,* as the anthology was called, became an immediate hit with fans. The collection (from Fantaco) which soon followed *Hembeck 1980*—contains fewer reprints and more original material, and marks Hembeck's new interest in becoming a storyteller in his own right, instead of simply an illustrated essayist.

Perhaps the strangest piece in *Hembeck 1980* is one which makes extensive use of such copyrighted characters as Sue Storm, Hawkgirl, and The Flash. Not only does Hembeck poke fun at the cliches which virtually define these characters, he actually uses the controversy surrounding the death of Iris Allen (The Flash's wife) and The Flash's then-current mental turmoil to build an entire story of his own. And then, with an unheard-of degree of mock-seriousness he draws the plot to its logical-but-unthinkable conclusion: the Crimson Speedster's commiting a murder.

A few weeks later, in the pages of *The Buyers Guide,* this outrageous parody was continued as if Hembeck had created his own alternate reality wherein he could control the destinies of the DC and Marvel heroes. It was a very daring move, and Hembeck says, "I don't know how I get away with it. They don't hassle me at all!" "They" (the editors and corporation bigwigs in the business) are probably laughing too hard to protest, come to think of it.

In the midst of his latest success, Hembeck has once more struck off in a fresh direction. He intends, he says, to begin doing more stories featuring his own characters, rather than merely playing with already established ones. The recent *Smiling Ed Comics* (published by Fantaco) features his new hero, The Dog, who, with his young sidekick, Pup the Kanine Kid, fights the forces of crime and corruption. While The Dog bears an uncanny resemblance to a certain Caped Crusader, Pup owes his "origin" not to any boy Wonder, but rather to a long-dead army camp mascot who saw too much one night. The resultant pastiche is a whimsical look at gang-busting, doggy-style.

Hembeck is not resting on his laurels. In the works are two new comics: *Zany* and *Abbot and Costello Meet the Bride of Hembeck,* both to be published by Fantaco sometime this year. In addition to these solo efforts, Hembeck will be popping up in *The Buyers Guide* every now and then, as well as continuing his role as in-house comedian to the medium. His contagious good humor and unswervingly "fannish" outlook have earned Hembeck a unique niche in the world of comics—one he hopes to occupy as long as there is any "fun" at all in the funny pages.

Wendy and Richard Pini

SPEAK ON, CUTTER!
MY CHILDREN WERE NOT YET BORN WHEN IT HAPPENED.
AND DART WAS TOO LITTLE TO KNOW...
ALL RIGHT...
I'M NO STORY-TELLER--
--BUT I'LL DO THE BEST I CAN...

Two years ago, *Elfquest* was a twinkle in fandom's eye. I first heard about it at a comic-book shop where I had come to browse. A man standing next to me suddenly straightened up from the floor where he had been crouched and shouted to his buddy drawn by what'sername—you know, Red Sonja!!'' That intrigued me, and I took a look, too. I liked what I saw.

Last year, everybody in fandom was hopping on the bandwagon, praising Wendy and Richard Pini, calling *Elfquest* the most successful of the new self-published comic books, harbinger of an aesthetic breakthrough and, most important, a whole lot of *fun*.

This year, it looks as if *Elfquest*, the fan favorite, is about to become *Elfquest,* the national phenomenon. With the page count of each issue increased to forty and a press run of 25,000, the triennial comic has certainly come a long way from its humble beginnings. Not only has it taken fandom by storm, there are plans to unleash the saga on the general (non-comics-reading) public. Playboy Press will publish a novelizaiton of their work as a trilogy which Wendy will write and Richard edit. Negotiations are in progress with a New York animation studio to develop a feature-length *Elfquest* television movie. And as if that weren't enough, a company called Superior Models has brought out pewter figures of the major characters. From this, it may be only a short step to the day when we see Cutter and the Wolfriders puzzle fun books, cap pistols, and stretchable dolls. (Just kidding, folks!)

The popularity of the Pinis' creations is rooted in two things. First, the characters' designs *look* good. The elves have the kind of style, grace, and charm that Walt Disney would have given his right hand for. There is no doubt they will lend themselves well to the animation process. Second, the stories *read* well. There is a rare degree of wit and warmth in the books, a refreshing change from the sterile and overblown prose of most commercial comics.

All of this—the current recognition and the excellence upon which it is based—is the result of the unique teamwork of Richard and Wendy Pini, two of the most charming and talented people in the business. The story of how the couple met through the letters column of Marvel's *Silver Surfer* and were married four years later is the stuff of fantasy. Richard was born in Connecticut in 1950 and attended MIT before becoming the director of the Hayden Planetarium in Boston. Wendy, born in California in 1951 and educated at Pitzer College, was an artist long before she became known as fandom as the premier interpreter of Red Sonja. She did artwork for *Galaxy* magazine from 1974 through 1976, as well as exhibiting and selling at conventions.

In 1976 Richard, with his theatrical and technical experience from the planetarium, and Wendy, with her flair for the dramatic, teamed up with artist Frank Thorne to produce the widely acclaimed Red Sonja Show, an ever-changing celebration of the Hyrkanian swordswoman's personality, philosophy, and physical charms, sometimes featuring up to four ''Sonjas,'' each with her own interpretation of the heroine. To the surprise of some fans who thought Wendy's major interest in the character was walking around in costume and having her picture taken, she not only scripted an issue of Sonja's comic book but she brought a new depth to what had been a simple ''reverse-macho'' character.

In her long and moving monologue during the Red Sonja Show, Wendy amplified on this, showing both hostility and her well-founded reasons for it. Many men ignored the emotional implications of Wendy's speech, preferring just to enjoy her dance. But there were a number of women who though that Pini was being hypocritical by embedding her monologue in a provocative display of flesh. Although the Red Sonja Shows stopped in 1977, Wendy says, ''I still wish I had a better opportunity to make my ideas understood. There were so many sides to it that were never brought out; it created so much controversy. Sonja was an unhealthy character; she had mental attitudes that needed correcting. She could have been handled better than she was, but her anger, a woman's anger, was her woman's prerogative, given the circumstances. I tried to give Sonja a conscience. I tried to make her believable.''

This concern with a character's motivation, with human values, with emotional candor, is evident in Wendy and Richard's work on *Elfquest*. The one comment most often made about that series is that it makes one ''feel good'' to read it. The Pinis' enthusiasm for their work and their delight in the characters they have created show on every page. The resulting comic is both visually beautiful and extremely entertaining.

Will success spoil Wendy and Richard Pini? Not while they're having so much fun. And you know something? I'd kinda like to see a self-publishing venture like this really make it big. Imagine: *Elfquest* bike stickers in every specially marked package of Cheerios. The possibilities are endless.

Photo courtesy of Mark Feldman, from the book *Boris 2*

Boris Vallejo

Fantasy artist Boris Vallejo, he of the lush and exotic women, brute-strong men, dragons slain by the sword, oriental splendors blooming beneath alien skies, rich trappings of the harem viewed by lamplight, wild foliage of an untamed land eclipsing reason - Boris, artist of the seductive and the barbaric, tawny strength and langorous decadence, was, or so he says, with faint and educated Spanish accent, supposed to be a doctor when he grew up. To that effect he studied medicine for two years, studied also the violin, his second choice in life being to fiddle in some concert hall. Art? A hobby, something he also had a talent for. He studied art, but not as hard as medicine or fiddling. He doesn't say exactly when the tide went out on one dream and came sweeping in on another - it was a sea-change, a turn of fate, perhaps. And for a man with so much talent, a high school graduate at fifteen, a student at Peru's Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, it was a simple matter to blend the violinist's lyricism with the doctor's knowledge of anatomy and ultimately emerge as the visionary painter of a sybaritic and savage land whose entire existence is in the fertile reaches of the mind. A painter of dragons. Artist as alchemist.

It wasn't quite as easy as it might have been. It never is. The world is not hospitable to art. You must, as the saying goes, pay your dues. To whom? Who collects all the dues the artists pay? No one knows, but pay you must. For Boris, who came to America, land of opportunity, at the age of 23 (''I'd had enough,'' he says of Peru, as if those three words explain it all) paying dues took the form of doing work - one can only technically call it ''art'' - for department stores. ''I drew refrigerator, pots and pans, you know...'' his voice trails off. ''How long?'' I ask. The reply is appalling. ''Six years.'' Six years of refrigerators would be enough to kill the spirit of any artist, I think, but I refrain from comment. ''It was my bread and butter work,'' he says, and permits himself a small sigh. ''Through friends I made some contacts - I did some things on the side - covers for Warren comic books, and for Skywald...also for Marvel. Conan and Zombies - a cover every three or four months. But still the advertising work was my bread and butter.''

In 1974, during one of the nation's periodic recessions, some of Boris' accounts went bankrupt. It was a blessing in disguise. He put together a few samples and presented them to Ace books - and the result was his first break into the field of paperback covers, with Edgar Rice Burroughs' ''I Am A Barbarian.'' That was in 1975, and since then Boris has become one of the most respected names in the world of fantasy art. Besides gracing book covers, his work has appeared on posters, and two volumes devoted to his cover art have been published.

But you know how you can tell when an artist has really ''arrived''? When he is allowed to paint what he wants to paint, not what is suggested by some novelist's publisher. In that sense, Boris has arrived at last - Ballantine will be publishing a volume of his paintings next Spring. These will not be examples of his talents as an illustrator - they will be thirty all-new paintings, plus around a dozen black and white illustrations - the unfettered Boris, as it were. The book to-be is called ''Mirages,'' and Boris describes it as ''erotic fantasy''. It will contain, in addition to his art, the poetry of his wife, Doris. Look around the convention - some of these unpublished paintings will be on display here for the first time. Their beauty, their sensuality, is like a getaway to the artist's private landscape of the heart - a world unlike any other. A pleasure-garden of unearthly delight. Mirages of the soul.

Photo courtesy of Mark Feldman, from the book *Boris 2*

Photo by Jim Ganatra

Bob Boze Bell

Out in Arizona, where men are men, women are women, and woosies are...well, *woosies;* where Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys are enshrined in a hundred juke boxes from Prescott to Scottsdale; where it gets so hot in the summer that beer is the poor man's answer to air conditioning—out there where cheatin' and goat ropin' vie for the title of Most Popular Pastime, Bob Boze Bell is creating a comic *verite* the likes of which has never been seen before. Look out, city slickers. Here comes the Queen of Country Swing herself—Honkytonk Sue!

Born December 19, 1946, Bob Boze Bell was raised in Kingman, Arizona. Yes, the very town mentioned in Chuck Berry's rock 'n' roll classic, "Route 66." "I loved Chuck Berry's version of the song," says Bell. "He enunciated very clearly when he got to the word 'Kingman.' But Perry Como—I hated him—he said, 'Kingsman, Arizona' when he sang it. And the Rolling Stones—I dunno. I kinda thing Mick Jagger didn't know what he was doing. He just kinda mumbles his way through that part, like maybe he didn't understand the lyrics or something." Kingman was where Bob Bell acquired the nickname Boze: "I had this thing playing baseball where I'd run around the bases backwards. So they started calling me *Payaso,* which is Spanish for Clown. That got changed to Bozo, as in, you know, Bozo the..... Anyway, that was shortened to Boze eventually."

Bell is the visuals editor for *New Times Weekly,* a Phoenix-based alternative newspaper. It was here that he began his work on Honkytonk Sue in a roundabout way. The first part of the series starred in the Doper-Roper in "Jackpot Roping." That story, reprinted in *Honkytonk Sue* No. 1, is about a tough old cowboy named Granthum P. Hooker (known to his friends as D-R), who captures an entire herd of hippie pot smugglers by roping them from the top of a moving pickup truck driven by his wife, Ida Mae. This was followed by the introduction of Honkytonk Sue and her overweight sidekick, Donna Jean. "Sue is a kind of female Clint Eastwood," Bell says. Or, one might say, a Stetson-hatted Red Sonja *sans* vow of celibacy.

Sue and Donna Jean get into a lot of heavy scenes—like the showdown with Mr. Disco ("You New York boys are all alike," says Sue as she grabs the Travolta-clone by the lips and flips him end-for-end across the dance floor. "Yer all mouth"). Then there's the close encounter with the "Lady Killers from Outer Space" ("You guys got any beer?"). What characterizes Bell's work is his unerring ear for dialect. These characters have calluses on their hands, and Bell makes you see them by the way his people speak. If there is any "message" to be found in these comics, it is that Bell is a staunch regionalist who wants to preserve the unique cadences of Western speech and music. His voice is as authentic in its own way as Will Eisner's is when he writes about The Bronx.

Honkytonk Sue has spawned a local cult of sorts, not unlike that which has surrounded Marvel's Red Sonja. Something in these images of tough heroines appeals to women's fantasies. "There are about four or five women now who dress up as Sue," says Bell. "We had one of them up at the Country Swing Dance Contest last year in Scottsdale." Was Honkytonk Sue modeled after a real person? "No. She's an ideal, a product of what I've known in my own life. My mother and her four sisters were into horses. My cousin was the world champion roper in 1964. I worked my way through school [the University of Arizona, where he studied art from 1965-1970] playing drums in a country-and-Western band. I still play as a matter of fact. Honkytonk Sue came out of the kinds of scenes I saw in the bars where we played. I was inspired by a piece S. Clay Wilson did called 'Hog Riding Fools,' but, of course, our styles are entirely different. I'm trying to give a true picture of the West. In a way, I think the Western painter Charlie Russell is my greatest influence. Him and Oliphant, the political cartoonist, and Jeff McNelly, creater of *Shoe.*"

Bell's future plans, besides more tales of Sue and Donna Jean (and the Beatles!), include a comic book about an old Western hero named Kid Hooker. "This one will be even more realistic than *Honkytonk Sue,*" says Bell. "It'll be set in the last century, and you'll see even more of the Charlie Russell influence, I suppose. Kid Hooker is an ancestor of Sue; it's the name of an old Arizona ranching family. Well, Kid Hooker will be a different kind of story. It'll be violent, but I will use the violence sparingly and, I hope, vividly, to show it as abhorrent as it really is."

Whether he's doing sociopolitical satire like the Doper-Roper, tongue-in-cheek adventures like Honkytonk Sue, or serious stories of the Old West, Bob Boze Bell is a unique voice in the world of comics—and it's about time city folk sat up and listened.

MICHAEL WM. KALUTA

I first met Michael Kaluta a couple of years ago at a convention in New York. As usual, I had misplaced my glasses and was wandering around in a blind fog. I thought I was headed for the ladies' room, but I must have gotten lost, because the next thing I knew, I was about to run into a painting of a sphinx with a large eyeball in her mouth. That stopped me dead in my tracks. I turned around and came up face-to-face with a portfolio of Michael Kaluta's original artwork for DC's *Shadow* comic. I must have paused too long, looked too interested, for the man behind the counter, a dark-haired fellow wearing a navy blue T-shirt, came over to supervise my squint-eyed perusal of the beautiful pages. Embarrased, I had to say something which would explain my presence. "Are you *really* Michael Kaluta?" I blurted out. Not that I doubted he was, of course, but that's how the words came out.

"Yes, I really am Michael Kaluta," he said, bowing his head in a manner at once sardonic and kind.

My move. Pause. "Well, I really like your work on *The Shadow*. (Jezzis, I sounded like a nerd.) "I guess you must get tired of people coming up to you and saying that!"

He smiled. "Not at all. I *love* it when people come up to me and say that!" We both laughed. I had come to the last page in the portfolio, and since I had already proved myself a conversational dolt, I was turning to leave when he reached under the counter and brought out a heavy, black-bound sketchbook. "Here," Kaluta said, sliding it across the table, "Wanna look at this?"

Did I? Does The Shadow know? You bet! For the next half hour I just stood there turning pages and soaking up images. The Shadow as a puppet-master, playing criminals as though they were marionettes. A woman on the beach. A woman drinking coffee. Fragments of old blues songs. Arabic gardens. Faces. Hands. A taxicab from 1932. Familiar pictures: cover roughs for comic books and paintings. Unfamiliar ones: a woman seated on the running board of a luxury coupe, a smoking automatic in her hand. The caption read: *Margo Lane, assistant to The Shadow, drives a Packard*. It was an ad page from some magazine that could only exist in the alternate universe of Kaluta's mind. I was spellbound.

We began to talk. The conversation ranged from Tarot cards and Blind Willie Johnson to art nouveau and astrology. I mentioned as a curiosity that I had first seen his work on *The Shadow* when a friend had bought a copy in Guatemala City and hitchhiked north with it in his pack. "That's funny," said Kaluta, "I was born in Guatemala City!"

He said he was working on a very personal project—the complete illustrationof the novel, *Metropolis*, upon which Fritz Lang's famous film was based. "Not many people know that Lang's wife wrote the book. Her name was Thea Von Harbou," he said. "That's funny," I said. "My grandfather was her lawyer! She gave my mother chocolates!" We parted as if we had known each other since the 1920s. Perhaps we had.

Kaluta (along with Jeffrey Jones, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Berni Wrightson), was a member of the now-disbanded "Studio," the famed neo-pre-Raphaelite gang of four who contributed so heavily to the aesthetic flowering of comics during the early and mid-1970s. It was sad to see these men drift away from sequential graphics, one by one (not that I don't like paintings and posters, but the field is so much poorer for their loss). Of the group, only Kaluta has retained any link at all to comics, turning in a steady succession of covers for DC's mystery titles, plus the infrequent Batman cover. There's no turning back, I know, but even when the lavish *Studio* book came out (signaling, coincidentally, the breakup of the very thing it documented), I couldn't help but wish that Kaluta would draw a comic once again. Pure selfishness on my part, of course, but I was not alone in that.

While I was wishing, Kaluta was busy with other projects. He seems to be a man who meets people well. One day, while sitting in a restaurant, he he saw some women reading science fiction magazines. A conversation ensued, and before you could say, "Gale Allen and her Girl Commandos," he was designing sets and costumes for their interplanetary Off-Broadway play, *Starstruck*. Charles Vess, another cartoonist-illustrator, also helped with costuming for this production, which was written by Elaine Lee, Norfleet Lee, and Dale Place. The play is a science-fiction comedy, features everything from a sapceship built from the flesh of millions of Girl Guides to Orga the Killer Cyborg, who might be described as a giantess with a vocabulary similar to the Hulk's (Orga crush!"). There are also Eeeeeeeeeluh, the emphatic fish-woman ("that's nine e's and an l-u-h," says Michael with characteristic precision) and Erotica Ann ("she's a pleasure android with popped synapses who is capable of infinite thought"). The play premiered in April and ran four nights a week for four weeks, but if you missed it, don't worry. There's a good chance for a revival.

Still, the best is yet to come: Kaluta's back in comics! With Harlan Ellison scripting and Michael Kaluta illustrating, Fantagraphics will bring out an original *Shadow* book this fall. I asked him about the project. "I can't tell you much about it yet," Kaluta says, "but the base line is this: Harlan and I are two people who really respect the character and are known as prima donnas in the field. Does that answer your question?" The patented Kaluta sardonic laugh follows this declaration. Then he relents and drops the pose. "It's gonna be fun, ya know?"

I know. And so (nyeh-heh-heh-heh-heh) does you-know-who.

JOHN CALD-WELL

His cartoons have been called "weird," "bizarre," "in bad taste," and, not surprisingly, "funny." "If I had my way," he says, "I'd live my life as a Marx Brother." His hobbies include "making red lips, refrigerator interior design, and fashioning pot holders from used dental floss," and he has "recently discovered the joys of bacon sculpture and Japanese Jello baths."

Huh?

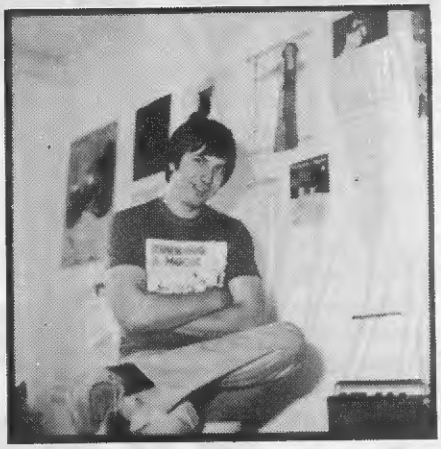
John Caldwell, whose work can be seen in *The National Lampoon, The New York Times, Oui, Esquire, Writer's Digest* and other magazines, not to mention his own collection, *Running A Muck,* is a man who has a vision-a vision of bumbling old men, female impersonator kangaroos, beaver vipers and pigeons who play practical jokes on little old ladies. Weird? Yes. Bizarre? But definitely! In bad taste? The nice thing about bacon sculpture is that you can eat it when you're done. Funny? You bet your life, as someone once said.

Caldwell, 34 years old, is somewhat of an engima. The first time I called him, I reached a sharp-tongued woman in what sounded like a beer-can factory. The clatter of machines, the sounds of voices raised in an attempt to be heard over the clatter, the buzz and hum of long distance lines. "John Caldwell Studio," said a voice wrapped around a cud of chewing gum. My god, I thought-he has a factory where he churns out these drawings of talking snakes and dumpy men in shapeless hats. I was dumbfounded. He wasn't in.

The second time I called, I reached Caldwell himself. No clattering machine-noises, no chewing gum voice. I had to ask - "Do you work in a ... a factory or something ... uh, I mean, do you have a big studio?" No, he said, he worked in a "hole in the wall in Schenectady, New York." But the machines ... the voices? "Oh, that must have been my answering service." It sounded reasonable enough - but I can't get rid of the impression that the man has a whole warehouse full of gum chewing women in platinum blonde wigs who dress up as shambling moustached men in wrinkled suits and model for bacon sculpture portraits. And pigs. Lots of pigs. Oh yeah, and the frogs. I bet he visits this frog hotel somewhere - buys 'em a beer and listens to their life stories, then goes back to the factory and writes it all down. Craziness like that can't be manufactured - it's just too true to life.

He's cagey, though - claims he's puzzled himself by the lines which appear on his paper. "I don't know where they come from, they're not me, and I'm *not* drawing a family album. It's not a conscious thing."

The question then remains - if it's not conscious, how does he manage to stay *asleep* so much of the time? Especially with all those factory noises going on in the background. I dunno - maybe it's quieter in the frog hotel.



DAVE SIMONS
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DAVE SIMONS

Imagine that epiphanal scene yet one more time:

"I went into this grocery store and found this coverless copy of *Thor*. The guy who ran the place would, you know, rip off the covers and send 'em back for the refund and then just sell 'em anyway. It was a Jack Kirby issue. Mr. Hyde and the Cobra got Thor's hammer somehow—maybe magnetically or somehow. It was really dumb, I guess, but that was it—that was *the* moment."

The story has a familiar ring to comic-book fans. What makes it special in this case is that the kid who bought that coverless copy of *Thor* and experienced four-color enlightenment for the first time was none other than Dave Simons, one of the lucky and talented few who have actually realized their childhood dream of becoming a cartoonist.

"Oh, I started out with *Casper* when I was about four, I guess," says Simons, "and I read every copy of *Superman* I could find in the late fifties and early sixties. But it wasn't until I was eight years old that I decided I was an artist. That's when I started drawing something every day, even if it was only just a doodle on a napkin."

That kind of dedication is unusual in a child, but it took a long time before Simons received the training he really needed. "When I was in high school in upstate New York, there was only one art teacher, so I took all the art courses I could—drawing, painting, and sculpture—but you couldn't call it a 'formal art education.' After high school I went into the Coast Guard and, during my last year in the service, I took John Buscema's workshop. That was the biggest help."

Simons credits Jim Steranko as another major influence on his way of approaching comics, but he feels that Berni Wrightson, Wally Wood, Will Eisner, and Frank Frazetta may have had more direct influences on his style. "Steranko was really neat-all that Zip-a-tone and everything," says Simons. "Frazetta is the best, though, for girls and jungles. I still get out my copy of Untamed Love sometimes and study the way he does girls' legs."

Although girls' legs may be a central part of any artist's repertoire, Simons is more closely identified with ducks' legs—and heads and bodies. As Gene Colan's inker on *Howard the Duck*, Simons has achieved a reputation for excellence in a very short time, having worked for Marvel for only a little over a year. He is refreshingly candid in his description of how he finally broke into a steady professional job:

"I tried for six years to get on at Marvel. During that time, I went through a number of stylistic experiments—very strange ones. It's kind of embarrassing—I had this Frank Robbins imitation, and a bad Craig Russ," Simon laughs. "And I was working with Ken Landgraf on various obscure, low-paying jobs. I was inking backgrounds on Ken's DC feature for free, just to get the experience and because we're friends. I was on unemployment at the time." Again, the deprecating chuckle. "I just kept on trying. Finally, I talked to Rick Marshall when he was up at Marvel, and he liked my stuff. He gave me my first job on *Howard the Duck*, inking Gene Colan."

How does he like working with Colan? "There's nobody else I'd rather ink than Gene Colan—there's nobody else like him. He has a masterful sense of light and shadow, and it's a challenge, too, because he positions things oddly sometimes, little unexpected things. It keeps you thinking, you know, and it keeps you interested."

Although Dave Simons is one of the newer artists at Marvel, his popularity seems to assure his future in the business. Asked about his upcoming plans, he says with mock-seriousness, "You know, I've been thinking about that. Maybe I'll do something really . . . self-indulgent . . . one of these days." And then he laughs infectiously. "Yeah, any day now I'm gonna do something really self-indulgent—but in the meantime, I'll be inking *Howard.*"